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Kennedy Needs Maxwell Taylor

P. H. Roberts likes to grow watermelons in gallon jugs. He will take a little melon when it is the size of your finger and insert it into the neck of the glass jug. Then he will watch it grow and swell, and will even feed it a little syrup to make it grow faster, until he finally has a jug full of watermelon, which he will then show to friends, who marvel.

Of course the watermelon in the jug is not good for anything. It is simply Mr. Roberts' hobby. He has eight acres of fine unjugged melons ripening for the market, according to the Adel News, and he just grows a few under glass so he can look at them on summer days on his farm northeast of Adel in south Georgia.

The United States has fine armed forces, well commanded and ready to serve. But in the pasture beside the Potomac each of them will occasionally hatch a pet project in the jug of its own interest.

Under stress of inter-service competition, one service or another may lose Mr. Roberts' perspective about his watermelon and instead begin to believe the glassbound project is good for something. This undue affection for one's own pet can, unless critically examined, lead to such delusions as the Cuban invasion plan, which failed.

So President Kennedy is considering employing Gen. Maxwell D. Taylor as a White House adviser. Taylor would cast an independently critical eye on the advice coming to the President from the Pentagon, the CIA and the State Department.

Some influential senators already think Mr. Kennedy is relying too much on White House advisers like Schlesinger, Bundy, Rostow and Sorenson instead of depending on his cabinet-rank department heads who make it a business to know their field. And Taylor would be one more adviser.

But Mr. Kennedy obviously needed independent advice about the Cuban battle plan. It didn't work. And he didn't like the feel of failure. Under the orderly chain-of-command system, where else was a president to turn for advice when his official military chiefs and intelligence directors and cabinet ministers recommended the plan?

Kennedy already was tending to set up competing centers of influence to keep the executive department on its toes, as FDR did. But a Taylor appointment would confirm the trend. It would give him a place to turn for independent advice on future Cubas. The president makes these decisions in loneliness. If he decides on the advice of the very men who grew the watermelon in the jug, he may be taking counsel from men whose devotion to the thing has blinded them to its fragility.

Gen. Taylor has a keen and critical mind that sweeps the whole military panorama with the professional knowledge of an Eisenhower. Kennedy obviously needs such a mind near him. Not even Ike, a professional soldier, was able to bring the reserve forces down to size, or to put a rein on competing and wasteful projects, and he left office warning the people against the danger of a military-industrial combination in American life and politics.

These problems are multiplying for Kennedy. Cuba gave him an early awareness. In the lonely moments of yes or no decision, a president does need personal, expert advice to guide his doubts, his questions and his calculations. He simply cannot afford to buy another well-loved watermelon encased in anybody's jug.

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